

Struggles of Hope: How White Adult Educators Challenge Racism

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The purpose of this study was to understand how White antiracist adult educators challenge racism. Seven participants from 5 different antiracist educational organizations were included. Data were collected over a 5-month period using interviews, documents, and participant observations and were analyzed using the constant comparative method. Results addressed the understandings of racism and White privilege that adult educators bring to their work and how these understandings guide them to challenge racism. A systemic understanding of racism, as well as an understanding of how their own White privilege affects them and People of Color, guided the adult educators' work. Their analyses of racism influenced the participants to take particular and strategic actions to challenge racism. The study has implications for adult educators who recognize the entrenchment of racism in our society and who want to move their abstract understandings to the concrete level of daily interactions and take specific actions within their educational practices.

Adult education has a long and varied history related to social change and social justice (Cervero, Wilson, & Associates, 2001; Cunningham, 1988; Hart, 1990) and is also a diverse field that encompasses many areas of practice. All areas occur within the structural power relations that exist in our society. One of the major structures that orders our world is race. Yet we seldom examine race and more specifically racism. When we do look at racism, we most often examine it from the perspective of People of Color rather than from the perspective of members of the group who continue to benefit from its existence, Whites. As adult educators, a White woman administrator and two academicians, a White male and an African American woman, we felt that one way to understand this phenomenon was to examine White adult educators who were conscious of their whiteness, who

understand how whiteness operates in everyday learning situations, and whose educational practices are guided by an antiracist agenda. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand how White antiracist adult educators challenge racism.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

During the last decade of the 20th century, there has been an increasing interest within several disciplines in foregrounding, interrogating, and re-articulating "whiteness." Within the discipline of education, discourses have emerged to study racism not from the perspective of the "other," but from the perspective of whiteness and White privilege. There have been strident calls for an analysis of whiteness as a racialized category and for an examination of how whiteness has (mis)shaped knowledge production in American culture (Keating, 1995). Along with the need to examine whiteness as a racialized identity with connections to power and privilege, several authors have discussed the often unacknowledged presence of Whites throughout our history who have worked together with People of Color to call attention to and challenge the racism that structures our social, political, and economic relationships. We need visible examples of these alliances and coalitions to serve as models. As O'Brien (2001) asserts, "Making visible what white antiracism looks like today is crucial for our nation's future" (p. 15).

The interest in foregrounding whiteness occurs at a time when there has also been a proliferation in neoconservative racial projects in the United States (Omi & Winant, 1994) that seek to preserve White advantages through the denial of racial differences, the rhetoric of color blindness, and the myth of social equality and opportunity. The national rejection of affirmative action subtly represents race in apparently egalitarian and democratic terms while also acting as a defense of the racial status quo (Fine, 1997). In general, there appears to be a refusal among many White Americans to see institutional and systematic connections between White privilege, power, and success and a tendency to promote a colorblind viewpoint that views achievement as totally meritorious and tied to individual achievement. Some of these reactions are influenced by the changing demographics in the United States, the changing economic and industrial conditions during the last few decades, and the declining wealth for all but the richest Americans (Bowser & Hunt, 1996; McLaren, 1997).

Whiteness and the privilege and power that accompanies it is one of the barriers that cause some people to be overprivileged and others to be underprivileged. Therefore, understanding how one challenges institutionalized racism shored up by White privilege and power is one vital way to uncover the insidious aspects of whiteness and develop strategic ways to

address it. If we accept an explanation of racism as a system of oppression inseparable from the social and institutional power used to maintain it, we need to examine what people can and need to do to challenge that system. Aptheker (1992) thoroughly addressed this topic in his book *Anti-Racism in U. S. History: The First Two Hundred Years*.

A wealth of information has flowed from several disciplines including sociology, history, and education to highlight White as a racialized identity with its own history. Much of the new scholarship focuses on the project of unveiling the political, social, and cultural mechanisms through which whiteness has been invented and used to mask its own power and privilege. Dyson, in an interview with Chennault (1998), asserts that we also must recognize that the current studies of whiteness and the groundbreaking writings by White scholars are building on the often unacknowledged tradition of Black critical reflection, including the works of W. E. B. DuBois (1903), James Baldwin (1963), and Zora Neale Hurston (1934), among others.

In the 1970s, Robert Terry (1970) and David Wellman (1977) introduced the idea of White identity, both exploring what it meant to be White and connecting White identity with social interests, racial attitudes, and racism, while Katz (1978) introduced her work on White awareness and antiracist training. These works were followed in the 1980s by Bowser and Hunt (1981), Helms (1984), and Jones (1981), who addressed issues such as the motivations and effects of racism, the development of White racial identity theory, and the naming of racism as a function of institutionalized patterns of White power and social control (Bowser & Hunt, 1981).

Although whiteness is conceptualized as socially constructed, its invisibility has profound effects on those defined as the “others” by the dominant culture. Whiteness itself has been constructed through social comparisons to those seen as less fortunate or inferior; whiteness has not been conceived as “the problem” in the eyes of White people, in research, educational settings, or elsewhere. It has made itself invisible by asserting its normalcy and transparency in contrast to the marking of “others” on which its transparency depends (Frankenberg, 1997).

Within the field of education, there have been attempts, especially within teacher education and critical multicultural or antiracist education, to address White identity and its privilege. Antiracist education began to surface more in the United States within critical multiculturalism, which also critiques the construct of whiteness, especially the practices and ideas that establish and promote White hegemony over others (McLaren, 1995; Rodriguez, 1998; Scheurich, 1993; Sleeter, 1995). Antiracist education supports explorations of race, class, and gender as sources of socially constructed differences and as sites of power relations, calling for an understanding of how these processes are produced, reproduced, and contested in the

everyday practices of schools (Dei, 1996). It moves beyond a focus on individual prejudices and discriminatory behaviors to examine how racist ideas and actions are entrenched and supported in institutional structures (Simmons, 1994).

Adult educators have also recently begun to examine issues related to educational opportunities, classroom interactions, and expectations for different groups juxtaposed against the norm of whiteness. Colin and Preciphs (1991) outlined the impacts of racism on the development of practitioners' perceptual patterns and showed how these patterns are reflected in adult education practice and the teaching-learning process. They further asserted that many adult educators are unaware of the extent to which theories and research reinforce White racist attitudes and assumptions about non-White learners, thus sustaining the perpetuation of inequities (Colin & Preciphs, 1991). Their statement that "almost nowhere in adult education literature and research is racism recognized as an integral and influential part of American life that requires our immediate attention" (Colin & Preciphs, 1991, p. 62) remains a powerful indictment and call to action.

More recently, explorations have been made of the interlocking systems of privilege and oppression in adult education classes (Lee & Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Tisdell, 1993), the development of a consciousness of White privilege and its effects (Barlas, 1997; Barlas et al., 2000), practices related to adult community education that elide and disguise whiteness and its effects (Shore, 1997, 2000, 2001), and the power dynamics in teaching and learning practices that underscore how societal power relations affect classroom efforts (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998). Finally, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) have examined the historical and contemporary understandings of race in adult education and offer perspectives on race that inform current action in the field of adult education. They issue a call for adult educators to "name the racial barriers that cause some learners to be over-privileged and others to be under-privileged" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000, p. 155) and to understand how the power relationships of society affect their lives in education.

White adult educators who have recognized their own White privilege and the societal and cultural bases that support it can inform us about how to operationalize many of the suggestions made by adult educators and can add to the tradition of White antiracists who struggle together with People of Color to challenge injustice (Colin & Preciphs, 1991; Hayes & Colin, 1994; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000; Shore, 1997, 2000). However, few researchers or theorists have looked at how antiracism has been addressed by adult educators working in community organizations, and fewer still have examined how White educators within these antiracist organizations have been able to work to challenge racism. White adult educators who are practicing an explicit antiracist agenda can provide valuable and concrete

information for other adult educators who desire to challenge and change the effects of racial oppression and can impart strategies for confronting and challenging racism. A study of the practices of antiracist adult educators will expand our knowledge of the warriors among us.

METHODS

This study was a critical qualitative study designed to engage antiracist adult educators who have recognized the norms of whiteness, White privilege, and the power differentials associated with racism. Seven White adult educators who are attempting to challenge or transform relations of power within their practices were selected using criterion, maximum variation, and snowball sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The criterion sampling technique was applied to the organizations and to the participants. The selected organizations had to have an explicit antiracist stand and have as one of their stated purposes to confront and challenge racism. Maximum variation (Merriam, 1998) was also used to choose organizations that varied in type: (a) an organizational consulting group specializing in the creation of antiracist organizations nationwide; (b) a church that has undertaken many efforts to challenge racism; (c) a nonprofit organization involved in prison activism; (d) an antiracist campus organization; and (e) a nonprofit, nationally focused educational organization. After identifying 10 potential organizations using the Internet and key informants whom the lead researcher met at antiracist workshops and conferences, snowball sampling (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992) was used to identify organizations and persons who would participate. Within each of the five organizations, at least 1 White participant was chosen from each setting in an effort to obtain the perspectives of adult educators who work within antiracist organizations. Seven total participants were chosen for the study. These White adult educators can describe the beliefs, practices, and strategies they use to confront racism within a racialized society that privileges their existence. Additional criteria were used to select participants. The first criterion was that the participants be currently working with adults in an educational and activist capacity. Adult educational literature suggests that one of the best means of engendering changes in beliefs and behaviors is through transforming, educational experiences (Cranton, 1994, 2002; Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 1997, 2000). In addition, it was assumed that the adult educators in this study, who had recognized and resisted the power of whiteness and privilege in their own work, would be better able to communicate their experiences with others. The second criterion, that participants be over the age of 30, and the third criterion, that they have worked in their current organization or similar organizations for a minimum of 5 years, relate to information suggesting

that as we grow and mature, we become more able to critically reflect on our own experiences. In addition, the ability to describe an evolution in beliefs and practices related to racism, as well as the ability to conceptualize and use strategies to confront racism, presuppose a maturity developed through addressing and examining the complexities and contradictions of racism over time. The richness of experiences provides a springboard from which to speak and act.

Four types of data collection were used: semistructured interviews, observations, document analysis, and field notes (Merriam, 1998). With the help of an interview guide of 15 questions that centered on the participants' responsibilities, goals, and motivations, in-depth face-to-face interviews of an hour to an hour and a half were conducted. The meetings took place in three different southeastern states and one northeastern state. Document analysis and observations were used to triangulate the interviews, the primary data. The targeted organizations' educational and promotional materials and newsletters were analyzed. In addition, three of the participants had written books, and one of the organizations had a curriculum guide. These documents were also analyzed. The data collection method of observation was used only when observations were possible. Two of the target organizations used workshops as integral parts of their antiracist work. The lead researcher attended two workshops, one lasting 2 days and the other 3 days, and was able to observe 4 of the participants at work. Field notes (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992), which took the form of journal entries, notes and memos to the file, and observer comments, stand as constructed representations of the researchers' experience with participants and the phenomena. Documents, observations, and field notes were used primarily for triangulation and to refine the themes and categories. Meaning was assembled from the data but was also informed by examining theoretical constructs of race.

Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method, which involves comparing one particular incident or segment of data from interviews, field notes, or documents with another segment in the same or a different data set (Merriam, 1998). This study primarily used the constant comparative method as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). This method of systematic and inductive qualitative data analysis allows the researcher to stay close to the participants' feelings, thoughts, and actions as they relate to the focus of inquiry. The process of searching for meaning among the words and actions of the participants framed by the researcher's focus of inquiry begins by identifying chunks or units of meaning in the data, a process sometimes referred to as unitizing the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The smaller units of meaning then serve as the basis for defining larger categories of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This process resulted in the major themes of the study, which answered the research

questions and allowed the researcher to develop a story line to integrate the data and create a picture that was somewhat different but reflective of the data collected for the study (LeCompte, 2000; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

SKETCHES OF THE ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PARTICIPANTS

Brief profiles of the participants in the study and descriptions of the organizations in which they work are provided before the presentation of the themes in order to contextualize the results and provide the reader with information needed to better understand and situate the findings.

The *prison activist organization* is located in a rural section of the southeastern United States; in the words of its director, it is a “very small, very grassroots” antiracist organization that exists to “monitor what goes on in the so-called criminal justice system of area communities.” It is a nonprofit organization and is supported by grants from several foundations. The organization’s activities include visiting prisons and prisoners, advocating on behalf of prisoners and their families, calling attention to the system’s inadequacies, investigating the racist practices of judges, and increasing the public’s awareness of all these conditions.

Paul and Sara are the two full-time employees of the organization. Paul is a White male in his early 50s. He has worked as director of the prison activist organization for 9 years but has worked in the areas of prison activism and antiracism for about 30 years. He has also been involved with a long-standing community in the Southeast that has a social justice and theology or faith-based focus. Sara is a White woman in her early 30s who formerly worked for 14 years at a community center in a southern metropolitan city that served the homeless of the city and was about “undoing racism and sharing life together in a diverse community.” She was born and raised in southern Florida by parents who were active in the Civil Rights movement.

The second organization, a *Presbyterian church* in the southeastern United States, is a multiracial church community that works to actively challenge racism throughout their catchment area. The minister and church elders have completed many workshops on racism for church groups within their denomination and geographical area, as well as around the country. The minister and one of his church elders, an African American woman, have written and published a book chronicling their church’s experiences, struggles, and successes in developing a multiracial congregation and in which they specifically examine the impact of racism. Most recently the church has worked in collaboration with other groups to challenge the prison industrial system and to increase awareness about predatory lending practices in their local area and state.

Robert is a White male in his mid-50s who has been the pastor of the Presbyterian church for almost 20 years. He grew up in the Mississippi Delta region and later attended college in Memphis, where he began to actively work to challenge racism. He worked in the political campaign of the first Black candidate to run for mayor of Memphis and worked in support of the garbage workers' strike in Memphis in 1978. After graduating from divinity school, Robert became an ordained pastor and copastored a church in Norfolk, Virginia, with his wife. He went from Virginia to Nashville and then to his current church in another southeastern state, where he has served since 1983.

The third organization, a *multiracial educational organization* located in the northeastern United States, is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 to support cultural exploration and self-discovery among White Americans. The organization, cofounded by a Black woman and White man, examines White culture in the context of the greater American culture, recognizing the long-standing racism, racial inequality, and injustices in our society and specifically addressing issues related to the norm and invisibility of whiteness and White privilege. They assist organizations with their internal growth toward a multiracial culture, create forums for dialogue, maintain a Web site, and have published several papers related to decentering whiteness and creating a multiracial society.

Jim, a White male in his late 40s, cofounded the organization and is currently the executive director. He has a master's in business administration and 15 years' managerial experience in the nonprofit and private sectors. He has worked as vice president of a diversity and organizational development consulting firm. Jim has published a book, now in its second printing, that describes the history of racism in our country and discusses the ways that White people can learn and work for a society that centers on multiracial values and experiences.

The fourth organization, an *organizational consulting group*, is primarily based in the southeastern United States but also contracts nationwide. Although there are several facets to the work it does, one important component is the work against racism in organizations. It works primarily with nonprofit organizations over a period of 1–2 years to enable the companies to create their own antiracist organizations. Within its program, it conducts a workshop that addresses the history and legacy of racism, the impact of White privilege on our society, and an exploration into collaborative efforts to challenge racism.

Terry, one of the key trainers in the organizational consulting group, is a woman in her mid-40s who was born in what she describes as "an upper-middle-class, White, liberal college town in a liberal family." She has worked for 15 years in various antiracist organizations in the Southeast. She has been a major contributor to the development of her organization's workshop to help groups develop an analysis of racism.

The fifth and final organization, a *campus antiracist organization*, is located on a university campus in the southeastern United States. Its principal goals are to promote human equality/social equality, target institutional racism, dismantle ignorance through education, promote awareness of racism, and promote racial equity by speaking out against inequality. It was created by a group of undergraduate and graduate students and faculty members after participation in an intensive workshop related to understanding and challenging racism. The group has built alliances with community groups, and the energy has been refocused into several different local initiatives, including a living-wage campaign on campus and a broad-based community effort formed to demand accountability and increase awareness about the questionable death of a Black prison inmate.

Alex and Steven are both affiliated with the campus antiracist organization. Alex is a White male in his mid-40s; he is currently a philosophy professor and was instrumental in the creation and development of the campus antiracist organization as well as other efforts in the community. Alex also infuses his philosophy classes with topics that address race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; in 2000, he was the guest editor of a topical issue on racism for a philosophy journal. In the piece he wrote, he discussed the implications of democratic educational principles for the work of antiracism and how knowledge of antiracism also forces one to reexamine one's own pedagogy. Steven is also a White male in his mid-40s; with a military father, Steven grew up around and on army bases mostly located in the Southeast. He became involved with the antiracist campus organization, participating in meetings, in weekend retreats, and in several demonstrations. Steven also worked with other members of the organization to document the layout of the campus in terms of race, job placements, and wages and has worked to address racist practices in the community where he lives.

RESULTS

The results from this study are presented using themes and are organized to address the study's two research questions: (a) What understandings of racism and White privilege do the adult educators bring to their work? and (b) How do their understandings of racism and White privilege guide them to take action to challenge racism?

UNDERSTANDINGS OF RACISM

Two major categories emerged that explain how the participants understood racism. First, racism was seen by the participants as a systemic and significant problem in American society. Secondly, the participants

understood the impact of White privilege as a major factor in the lives of People of Color.

Racism as Systemic

All of the adult educators shared an analysis of racism as systemic. Although they agreed that individuals perpetuate racism and carry out discriminatory acts as a result of prejudices and stereotypes, they were all clear about the system of racism within our society. Several of the participants developed their analyses of race through their job experiences. Robert, a Presbyterian minister, is a typical example of how work influenced his perspective on race and racism:

It was obvious that most of the folk in prison, even at that time, were Black folk which was in 1970, '72. And they got much worse treatment than White folk, and so I began to make connections, just make observations when I went into court to observe I guess at that time 60% of folk were Black; now it's almost 100% that come through those county courts.

Terry, who has been working in one capacity or another in various antiracist organizations for 15 years, began early in her career to get a "power analysis that I didn't have before. I learned a lot from all these trainings and got this analysis about how racism is more than just personal prejudices that we have against each other." She explains:

The system creates dysfunctional people. White people, we have our set of dysfunctions and People of Color have their set of dysfunctions, and sometimes they overlap and they certainly play off each other very well, and the more official word for that would be internalized racial oppression for People of Color and internalized White supremacy for us, but those in real language what it translates to is that folks have learned a way to cope generally in this society and this structure.

The participants did not negate the role that individuals play in their efforts to make changes in themselves and society. Each carried an understanding that change begins with the individual and that blaming or passing the responsibility for change to the institution or to the system was a frequently used excuse. Although trying to get people to see that they make up the system and that as part of the system the change must begin with them is often complicated. Several participants talked about the difficulty of changing systems, or as Alex said, "trying to get people to organize, to change,

and to make changes in institutions, be more accountable to people in those institutions” or even getting other Whites to acknowledge that racism is systemic and institutional. They also frequently acknowledged the power and pull of systemic racism, along with its impact on Whites and People of Color, albeit in different ways. Paul explains:

It’s hard to get to the next place in explaining racism and the racist nature of the system. And especially when most of the actors, most of the key players are still White folk. Even if the judges were fairly conscious of the race issue there’s still no real identification with People of Color and the issues they’re faced with. I mean the institution-ization is the biggest issue, the institutionalization of racism.

Terry, a workshop leader, used a particularly cogent analogy to describe the system of racism within our society. She described the mechanism as a conveyor belt or an airport’s moving sidewalk to illustrate racism. Terry described an active racist as one who is moving and walking in the direction that the sidewalk is moving, only quickening the pace. A passive racist, she explained, is someone who is standing still, letting the moving sidewalk move her along, going with the movement and not slowing it down. She described an antiracist as someone who is going in the opposite direction, against the flow of the moving sidewalk.

The participants’ recognition of systems of privilege and oppression was part of a broad, societal standpoint in which there is recognition of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability as connected to material resources and opportunities. Their understandings also included a more personal recognition of how privilege and oppression affect their own lives and the lives of those around them. In examining their understanding of racism, the participants frequently commented on how the systems of privilege and oppression were interlocking, supporting, and upholding one another. One technique successfully employed by several participants is comparing or finding parallels among broad social issues. For example, they noted how they have used conflicts with sexism in their own lives to help them understand and address racism (McIntosh, 1995). They are also able to make connections from what they see around them, observations such as the better academic preparation of students from more privileged economic backgrounds and how those issues are not inseparable from the issue of race. Although they emphasize the systemic characteristics of racism, these White adult educators understand the necessity of relating the political and structural factors to their personal lives and observations and using those experiences to communicate with others.

Impact of White Privilege

The second dimension of the participants' understanding of racism was the analysis of their own whiteness and White privilege and what that means in our society and in their individual lives, especially in relation to their efforts to challenge racism. The process of critically reflecting on one's own life and obtaining insight into one's own privilege cannot be underestimated in its importance to the process of becoming a change agent. These adult educators have not only recognized their White privilege but explicitly connected it to their work. All participants could immediately recall when they became aware of racial differences and their White privilege; when and how they developed an awareness of what it means to be White in our society; how they have processed the personal lifelong undoing of racism; and the contradictions associated with being White and working to challenge racism. For the participants in this study these moments were life markers, or as Mezirow (1978) states, these moments were points of transformational learning where a new understanding was developed and a new point of fresh understanding would be used to assess their life experiences. The understandings that have come from their recognition and struggle with their own and other Whites' privilege are a big part of what enables them to continue to challenge racism.

Whiteness revealed through difference. The participants all had many specific experiences in which they became attuned to issues of race and whiteness, including their own White privilege. However, most frequently their awareness of whiteness and White privilege was mediated or came after experiences that made them more acutely aware of racial differences. In other words, they got it when they experienced themselves in relation to People of Color, followed at some point by the realization of their own whiteness and what it means in our society. The fundamental insight from this experience was that being seen as different is a daily learning occurrence for People of Color. For many of them this factor explained why People of Color have a more sophisticated sense of race and racial politics.

Paul, who directs the prison activist organization, recalled many experiences that led to his dawning realization of his own whiteness. While he was in the Navy, Paul went absent without leave and was sent to prison. In the brig, he saw how people were treated differently because of the color of their skin, as well as the disproportionate numbers of People of Color who were in jail. He had an initial and abiding reaction that the situation was not right and should not be happening. He said, "it was sort of the beginning of you know kind of scraping away stuff that had built up around my eyes and to see that I did indeed have privilege and I had some learning to do." For

Paul this transformational moment cemented his commitment to fostering change, one situation at a time.

Several participants remember events in childhood where they began to be more aware of racial differences. Jim and Robert both describe memories of watching the events of the Civil Rights movement on television as teenagers and realizing that “Black people were being beaten because they were Black,” and as Jim says, understanding that “even though it was not anything I supported, I knew I would not be beaten.”

The experiences of these White educators mirror the experiences of other White activists as they come to understand their racial selves. As whiteness has until recently been constructed as the invisible norm, Whites have been left with only knowing themselves *racially* through juxtaposition of their experiences with those experiences of People of Color (Gilborn, 2004; Leonardo, 2004). The ramifications are that Whites can remain focused on what to do about the problems experienced by People of Color and not on themselves and the insidious workings of whiteness as the crux of the problem. This is reminiscent of the recognition by Malcolm X and others (Carson, 1981; Haley & Malcolm X, 1964) who have said that what Whites need to do is work with their own people to understand who they are as racial beings and to address their own White privilege. Although coming to know ourselves as Whites in relation to People of Color is a common experience, to remain stuck there can, as many of the White adult educators in this study suggested, interfere with the “work” that needs to be done.

Development over time. Most participants had experiences that moved them along in their knowledge of White privilege and its ramifications. All agreed that the understanding related to whiteness, White privilege, and racism develops and changes over time. Although one participant noted that he knew he was White as he “grew up in the South where it was fundamental,” he also said, “It was only as I got to be an adult and think back on it that I realized fully the kind of privileges that came with it.” The adult educators also talked about the various phases of White racial identity development they have navigated over time and about their emotions and feelings in relation to their developing awareness, as well as the existence of ongoing learning experiences. All expressed how their understanding of what it means to be White and privileged continues to develop through their work.

“Always undoing racism”. Although the adult educators remembered vividly the circumstances around when they first realized they were White, a more important facet of understanding for them as antiracist educators was

the need and the difficulty of always having to confront and challenge the privilege, as well as the benefits, that they obtain just by being White in our society. Through conflict and struggle within themselves and with others, these adult educators are always attempting to undo racism. Towards this effort they conscientiously examine their own lives and talk with other people about the impact of racism and White privilege. Paul says:

I identify myself as a recovering racist and it's not a unique term; others have claimed that too. I realize, maybe not daily, but I certainly realize very very frequently no matter how hard I try to maintain an antiracist position, that I am still undoing racism within myself.

The constancy of having to always "be on your toes and vigilant" as Paul described can sometimes be trying and painful, as is coming to the realization that no matter how hard one tries one will still collude with the system of racism in some ways. Jim talked about the never-ending struggle to be acutely aware: "So, you know I slip into that unconscious sort of living within privilege and not seeing it that is characteristic of it as well." After relating what she characterized as a particularly painful story in which she invaded the privacy of a homeless man with whom she was working and "became real aware of the power I have as a White person," Sara says that she still "has to be really careful how I use the power I have within the White racist system" and how "I always have to be about struggling for the awareness of how my White skin gives me privilege and benefits even if I don't want them."

While many contradictions surfaced for these White adult educators when reflecting on their experiences of being White and working to challenge racism, the two most salient and most frequently identified were the ways they are viewed by other Whites and the ongoing awareness of the fact that they will always be privileged as White. Being White and working to challenge racism were seen as both a contradiction and an obstacle. They frequently encountered appeals by other Whites to in some way join in the system of whiteness. As Paul says, it is "sort of this good old boy . . . maybe we can find some commonality in our whiteness where we can agree, even though we disagree. We can agree and talk as White men or White people together." Paul describes how no matter his level of involvement and commitment in racial justice issues, he is still White and will be seen as White by all those with whom he comes into contact. He reiterates several times how being a White person "becomes an obstacle in terms of forming trusting relationships with folks we are walking with" who are justifiably afraid of how the "White establishment might respond if they invite a White man into their lives." Many have learned lessons about their own White privilege the hard way, through painful personal experiences and personal failings.

In answer to the study's first research question, the participants have an acute awareness of what it means to be White in our society, and they also know that their understanding will continue to develop throughout their lifetimes. The most telling and emotional examples came from the experiences within their work where they see not only what being White means to them, but how it so significantly affects People of Color. Time and again, they related stories about their involvement in the justice system, in community organizations, in schools and colleges, and most importantly, about wrenching personal experiences where their *lack* of awareness of the power of their whiteness hurt another human being, usually a Person of Color.

HOW UNDERSTANDINGS GUIDE ACTIONS TO CHALLENGE RACISM

Understanding and focusing on an analysis of the systemic and institutionalized nature of racism as an obstacle often directly led the participants to develop strategic actions to challenge racism. While a personal analysis of racism guides these adult educators to take particular actions to challenge and change the system of racism within our society and to work simultaneously at the individual and institutional levels, their understandings are manifested in the work they do in two primary ways: (a) an ability to maintain a commitment in their struggles and (b) the development of specific approaches and strategies to more effectively educate other Whites about racism.

Help in Maintaining Commitment

The 7 adult educators in this study have been able to maintain their commitment to antiracist work from 10 to almost 30 years. Collectively, they have survived 120 years as antiracist activists, explaining how they will “never not see race” or how “once anyone starts to do this work you never stop.” Their deeply embedded and personal understandings allow them to believe that social transformation is possible, even though, as many of them believe, it will not be in their lifetimes.

Sustained by their beliefs and faith, the antiracist activists have constructed communities of support to help them maintain commitment to their work. Five of the participants describe beliefs in a particular religious faith that support their efforts, while the others talk generally about their beliefs in people and the possibility of social transformations. Alex says:

There's a need to see that there's something greater than yourself there. Even though I'm not particularly religious, as I've done the work I've realized that driving all of this there is a sense of “we could

be in a better place,” that there is something greater than ourselves. . . . But you’ve got to believe there’s a meaning for all of this. If you don’t think there’s a point to our lives in the world, then why are we involved in a movement for such a change?

Several participants were very clear about the spiritual and religious part of their work and definitely connect it to their ability to continue to work to challenge racism. As Paul says, “part of my commitment to my work comes from my faith, recognizing the humanity in everybody,” even though he admits that it is difficult sometimes “when folks are saying things that are abominable.” The fact that racist organizations also center their efforts on a strong, albeit primarily a fundamentalist, Christian belief system is not lost to the antiracist adult educators in this study. They see the difference between their faith-based work and that of the Christian fundamentalist as lying partly in the antithesis of what Paul describes above, along with the refusal to embrace those who are different and at worst harming them.

Other participants talked about their sense of justice as well as their abiding belief in the goodness of people, as Terry says, “the belief that most people want to do the right thing.” They often spoke of their work as “a conversion experience” or as “doing missionary work in a secular sense that pushes the current envelope.” Their belief and commitment in their work engendered an overwhelming sense of hope, in themselves and in others.

Their understandings of racism have guided them to acknowledge the importance of building a community of support, to gain a fuller appreciation of the time needed for change, and to draw consistently on their beliefs and faith. The participants felt that alliances with their communities are effective change mechanisms, and they spoke often of the importance and indeed the necessity of building and maintaining a community of support when doing this type of work. Sara warned about the loneliness that can come with doing this type of work in isolation:

I would say the impact is that it’s a lonely life on the one hand. On the other hand it’s a life filled with folk who really have a joyful sense about life even though they are faced with oppression every day and who are very welcoming. I’ve never felt like an outsider here, even though I am. I’ve been welcomed in, welcomed into the family. So that’s the other side of it; I don’t have a whole lot of time to sit around feeling lonely because I’m surrounded by folks who are welcoming me and who are leading me to do good things with my life.

Although the participants did not ignore or minimize the progress that has been made in combating racism, they invariably talked about the time it will take to make significant changes in the institutions and society. Collectively

they believed that social transformation will “take more time than we’ve ever allowed ourselves to admit.” Their understandings of the institutionalization and history of racism allow them to focus on the present and to develop an informed sense of justice and hope.

The experiences of these adult educators emphasize the reality that this work cannot be done alone, in isolation from other people. To do so not only would be unsuccessful but would not embody the spirit of coalition espoused by the antiracist educators. The connection and community with others, along with the support it brings, is an integral part of the work to challenge inequity and create a better and more just society. The importance of building and maintaining a support system also counters the tendency of some Whites to take charge, to miss the importance of working together with others and not primarily as individuals. Acknowledging the importance of a community of support brings us one step closer to tearing down some of the beliefs that shore up racism in our society. As one of the participants asserted so eloquently, “Whites don’t like to ask for help.”

Educational Approaches and Strategies

The adult educators use their understanding and analyses of racism and White privilege to elicit various educational approaches and strategies that they find effective in teaching others about racism in our society. In general, they all work to increase others’ awareness and consciousness of racism, as well as to develop the impetus for others to address their own and society’s racism. They emphasize the importance of relationships, a variety of experiential approaches, and the importance of holding themselves and others accountable as primary strategies in their antiracist work.

Importance of relationships. The participants repeatedly talked about how important it is to develop relationships with People of Color, with other Whites, and with other organizations. They emphasize the importance and quality of relationships that are not superficial and exploitive but rather respectful, sincere, and deep, emphasizing the significance of being mindful of racism’s impact on all of us, as well as the internal and external manifestations of racism for Whites and People of Color. They repeatedly returned to a discussion of relationships in the service of challenging racism and transforming society.

As one participant said, it is important “to listen to the issues from the folks that are most directly affected by those issues and really getting at the root causes of what’s going on in those communities.” The organization Paul directs is purposefully a grassroots, local organization in order to “stay

very connected to the folk we are walking with and not become yet another agency that would get caught up in its own bureaucracy.” Robert adds:

You always have to be listening to folk about where racism is impacting them most directly, where it may not have been doing that as much 10 years ago, now where is it going. It’s sort of like water seeking the lowest level and race is like that. If it gets blocked off some way it will seep around somewhere else. So you have to continue a dialogue with people of different races so you can keep the issues and where the slippery slope of racism is going. If you want to know the realities of the impact of race you should ask those who are impacted by it and so the dialogue with Black and Hispanic folk.

All of the participants discussed relationships they have had with People of Color, relationships in which they have learned many lessons and undergone transformations in their ability to understand how race affects us all. Alex articulates the importance of having deep relationships for several different reasons:

So, it’s really easy to be nonracist or nonsexist if your relationships are not deep or they are just on a superficial level. You know, I can get along with you and tolerate you, but it’s when you’re actually working closely together that this stuff comes out. Then you have conflict. When you have conflict is when your internalized superiority emerges. For some people it’s just there and they exude it, chauvinists or bigots. But for those of us who are the middle of the line, it’s something that’s all in your head, and it doesn’t come out until you’re getting into really deep conversations where you’re trying to do something together, and you realize there’s difference with how to do it.

In general, the tone of the participants and the words some of them actually used when describing the importance of relationships connote words like “transformation,” “conversion,” and “miraculous.” The significance of relationships in learning, teaching, and understanding racism was highlighted by all. They emphasized the need to be frank and honest about matters that concern race after developing the deep, intimate relationships that make such honesty possible and fruitful. Several participants talked about painful experiences that came after they had developed close relationships with People of Color, experiences in which the White adult educators admitted their internalized superiority had prompted them to act in less than respectful ways. They credited the significance and importance of the relationship as the primary reason they were able to stay with the difficult experiences and, more importantly, learn from them.

The emphasis the participants placed on the importance of relationships reinforces the literature in adult education that highlights the social nature of adult learning (J. S. Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wilson, 1993). And more importantly, the assertions these educators made about the quality of the relationships reiterates the need to be open and honest about race in order to make progress. Learning when to listen to others and when to give one's opinion is also primary in developing the significant relationships these educators described. As other activist educators have suggested (Gilborn, 2004; hooks, 2003), one needs to be willing to take risks and put issues on the table in the service of advancing one's relationships and challenging racism.

Experiential approaches. The adult educators described a variety of approaches and specific strategies used to educate others about racism and White privilege, but there were common approaches and strategies across the group. All of the adult educators emphasize experiential approaches that actively engage learners and approaches that take the learners' personal experiences into account. They also emphasize the power of personal stories. Finally, they recognize the importance of using many approaches, in order to find a way that will touch particular individuals' lives. Robert says:

There are many methods that antiracist trainers use and all of them in the end come down to the White person saying, "This has an impact on my life and I want to change." So you combine both a kind of history and group dynamics and personal testimony to get that impetus for the person to say, "There might be something here I need to listen to." And you don't know what will cause that movement in each person.

Most of the participants agree that it is important to start where people are and approach them in a nonthreatening way, partly in order to minimize the defensiveness and discomfort many people have when talking about race. Terry believes that "what needs to happen is people just need to be heard." She recalls many workshops where some White people in a group are so committed to having the antiracism training work that "they will push other people in their group in a way that doesn't allow people to say why they're scared to do it." Even though it is important to enter into the educational process in a way that does not immediately raise feelings of blame and guilt, the participants reiterate the need to push and challenge people to expand their thinking about racism when it is necessary to do so.

Alex uses many different experiential approaches and activities in his work to encourage his students to acknowledge and understand the system

of racism. His involvement with the campus and community antiracist group actually began when another educator brought a filmmaker, Francis Reed, and his film, *Skin Deep*, for a campus visit. Several students and faculty members were prompted to continue their dialogue about the film and its impact on their lives, and the antiracist organization grew out of these experiences. In his own classes with first-generation college students and older nontraditional students, Alex uses a variety of experiential approaches, including role playing, drama, and weekend retreats, to infuse topics related to racism and sexism into his classes. He has used role playing where the class depicts problem situations and then finds “a way of resolving those problems where everyone’s dignity is maintained or upheld.” Instead of term papers in some of his philosophy classes, Alex requires a collaborative project, often a class-produced play where students have to “organize the labor for various things like promotion, acting, writing, and they have to be accountable to each other.”

The participants also emphasized the power of personal stories for helping people understand the impact of racism on their own and other people’s lives. Sara relates how important it is for people to be able to tell their stories and how others can learn from them. She says:

the other really powerful parts of the Freedom Walk is that we stop at places at lunch time, for instance, and have people from the town tell us their story. So you experience from the voice of the oppressed what is really happening, because I think it’s so hard for White people to . . . it just doesn’t happen to us, so we really often times don’t see it.

The participants promoted approaches that call for a combination of strategies, as well as those that teach or develop a shared analysis of racism. They believe approaches that allow one to combine an analysis of racism with the history and legacy of racism is more effective than a one-dimensional approach, especially with regard to countering the current color-blind beliefs and rhetoric. Using small-group discussions to engage members who would be uncomfortable discussing topics in a larger setting can also be helpful. The educators also suggest having cross-racial teaching teams for workshops or courses as effective and essential. This enables the learners to see one example of an inclusive teaching environment and can provide the opportunity for the class to see how positionality affects the dialogue or perspective. Several participants believe they have learned and absorbed the information related to racism by teaching it themselves and use that strategy in their own self-development process. Within the field of adult education, research and writing are being done that examine the different social positions of adult educators and learners and the impact of positionality on their practices and research (Brown, Cervero, & Johnson-Bai-

ley, 2000; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Shore, 1997; Tisdell, 1998, 2001). These studies have investigated how power relations based on race and gender but including other interlocking systems of privilege and oppression are manifested in adult education classrooms and have emphasized the need to deal with how the positionality of participants operates in the teaching and learning environment. The findings of this study add information to the existing body of literature by showing that the positionality of White adult educators both enables them and constrains their ability to challenge racism.

Hold oneself and others accountable. The participants repeatedly talked about the need to continue to speak out and challenge the systems with which they come into contact, as well as continuing to hold themselves responsible for their own behavior, in the ongoing efforts to challenge racism. Paul and Sara continue to make formal challenges when they encounter officials who are engaging in racist behavior. Paul relates that when he and others have been able to begin a dialogue with people whom they started out being at total odds with, it has “almost always come after a challenge, not before the challenge is made,” thus demonstrating the effectiveness of continuing to challenge and challenge publicly. The importance of “calling people to task,” holding them accountable, and also using the media to challenge them publicly was demonstrated by several participants.

Several participants reiterated the necessity of speaking out and speaking up when people around them are not attending to the particulars of their behaviors. Whether it is redirecting a discussion, refusing to speak “for people” who are in the room and able to speak for themselves, or publicly refusing to participate in an organization that allows a racist organization to use its meeting space, these adult educators know they cannot and will not be silent. They assert that it is more often the silence of many well-meaning people and not the outright racist behaviors committed by some that keeps us from progressing beyond a point in challenging racism and inequity. Speaking when one knows it is easier to be silent is one powerful way one can hold oneself accountable.

DISCUSSION

The negative ramifications of the racist system in the United States has a differential impact on the life chances, educational opportunities, employment, housing, and access to financial resources of Whites and People of Color in this country (Feagin, 2000; Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2001; Hacker,

1995). Despite the obvious existing chasm between the “haves” and the “have nots” and the noncoincidental occurrence of Whites as more often the “haves” and People of Color as more often the “have nots,” there are growing popular and political discourses that deny the impact of race and proclaim America as a color-blind, meritorious society. Within this larger American system, our educational system exists as one of the foremost champions of the Horatio Alger belief of America as the land of equal opportunity for all citizens. However, the antiracist White educators in this study are stepping far beyond the myth of meritocracy and asking not only that we admit the failings of our society where privilege is accorded along racial lines, but that we move this abstract knowledge to the concrete level of our daily interactions.

Far too often educators elect to exist in the comfort of their ivory towers, never moving their ideas of democracy and equality past their writings or classroom lectures. The women and men in this study prefer instead to enact their beliefs in their practices and in their lives. Overwhelmingly the participants expressed the belief that educators must be realistic, intentional, strategic, and tireless in dismantling the racism that undergirds the American educational system. One of the major strands of the research on whiteness and White privilege within the broader social science literature talks about the importance of naming and marking whiteness as a racialized identity (Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Giroux, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000) as a first step in confronting the power of whiteness. The adult educators in this study embrace this assessment and believe that all too often educators critique away from their turf and concentrate on examining systems in which they do not participate. As antiracist educators, the participants in this study know that the critique must start within their own thresholds: Do my social and academic circles reflect my beliefs? Do my classroom practices reproduce the ills of society? Do I move further than my rhetoric in concrete, quantifiable ways? And then knowing the importance and urgency needed to dismantle racism in the educational setting, the adult educators in this study would also move to the next step, working with others to help them understand the historical entrenchment of whiteness in our society and its implication in the construction of racism.

The abstract notion of rejecting or abdicating their whiteness as advocated by Ignatiev and Garvey (1997) did not occur to the participants in this study. While it might sound conceptually intriguing, these participants were solidly grounded in “What can we do?” and what works and what doesn’t. They understood that racism is so entrenched within our history as a nation, within our culture, and within our institutions that the idea of forfeiting whiteness and its advantages amounted to intellectual calisthenics. These findings are supported by many writers and researchers within critical multiculturalism, teacher education, and the social sciences who agree

that it is not possible to just opt out of White privilege and the benefits that come with it (Levine-Rasky, 2002; McLaren, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000; Scheurich, 2002; Sleeter, 1995, 1996). As Rodriguez (2000) asserts, "Any theoretical and political efforts aimed at the abolishment of race run the risk of downplaying and not seeing just how deeply lodged race is at all levels of American life" (p. 11).

The fabric of their lives and their work to challenge racism gives the adult educators in this study an understanding of the time it will take to change the system of racism. They advocate spending the time necessary to build relationships, collaborate with others, and do the work needed to get society where it needs to be. For example, they encourage educators to set goals to determine the level of racism in their practice. For this group time is wasted trying to determine whether or not one's practice is racist. The answer to such a question is: of course. This is true whether one is White or Black or Latino. If one works within the U.S. system, one's practice is affected by racism. So for an antiracist educator, the question is, How do I identify and begin the unending process of rooting out the racism, remembering that solutions are temporary because power systems will morph and find a way to undo change? Moreover the process of trying to change one's practice is best accomplished in tandem with other like-minded individuals from across the racial spectrum. Simply put, well-meaning Whites can't get together to talk the good talk and solve the problems of "those" people. The very absence of others, especially "those others," from the table reproduces the problem in just another form. While dialogue is the beginning course of action, the participants all say that risk must be built into undoing a racist system so that ideas are translated into action. For example, when one southern research university that desegregated in the 1960s was beset with rioting students who were attempting to keep Black students from desegregating the university, it was antiracist White faculty who signed a petition and stood in opposition to the rioting student body. Sadly, at this same university 40 years later, when Black students marched on the administration building to demand that an office of institutional diversity be created, only one White faculty and five Black faculty could be counted among the protesters. The participants in this study would muse that the campus educators had not persisted in their antiracist actions but had been lulled to sleep by a seemingly more hospitable environment where Blacks were now represented in the student body and faculty at a meager 4% and 9%, respectively.

The beliefs and experiences of the adult educators in the study support the efforts to name whiteness, rework the meaning of race, and not deny racism's existence. These antiracist activists who have spent many years challenging the system of racism proclaim the importance of struggling everyday with the understanding of the system of White supremacy and its benefits. They spoke repeatedly about instances in meetings or discussions

when they are approached by Whites and People of Color alike to speak as an expert on a topic, even when there are knowledgeable People of Color in the room who should instead have the floor. Several spoke of their own complicity as well, and the need to always be watchful of their own actions and responses. For example, a strategy often used by some adult educators is to purposefully sit in the back of the room during a meeting or refuse to speak unless those who can more directly speak to an issue are allowed to voice their opinions. We are reminded of Myles Horton's story of being asked to leave a Civil Rights rally by Blacks who had no idea that he was a famous Civil Rights activist. He left peacefully and did not attempt to explain his importance or place in the Civil Rights Movement. On another occasion Horton told of having Blacks refuse to hold his hand as they sang "We Shall Overcome," a song to which he and his spouse had contributed verses and had helped to popularize. Horton related these stories and simply said that these experiences were about a movement maturing and inevitably about change. In analysis, Horton's actions attest to his self actualization: to be a part of making change that may not equally benefit a White person, to expect no gratitude for his work, and to be willing to take the role of dutiful follower instead of great White leader. Because the participants in this study understand the effect that racism has had on us all, these adult educators are intentional and steadfast in their efforts not to perpetuate the inequities of a racist system. So these participants try in small and in large ways to defer, to share, to listen, to serve, in an attempt to deprive. This does not mean entering into the academic deployment of giving away rights, but it denotes having insight into the workings of privilege and working consciously to lessen, manage, or negate racism's impact. So they sit in the back of the room, speak less, invite others in to speak, give credit and acknowledgments, and enable others to see depriving in action—no credit necessary.

Once the educators in this study recognized and examined their own White privilege, they made the choice to use their privilege to challenge racism and build a more equitable society. Their positionality enabled them to choose whether or not to use their privilege, and they are further enabled by their understanding that their perspectives are limited because of who they are and where they fit into the racialized system. This is central to what positionality is: attention to the location of the knower when judging any knowledge claim. The educators understand they do have a choice whether or not to act on their beliefs, and they have chosen to act. Therefore, what they do is intentional. Their positionality as White adult educators also enables them to call other Whites to task while also understanding the obstacles of Whites who challenge racism or even venture to admit their own privilege face in terms of pain, loss of family support, or loss of position.

The positionality of White adult educators also constrains their ability to challenge racism in several ways and speaks to the contradictions that were surfaced in this study. The educators will always be seen and judged as White, which will affect the amount of trust they can build with communities and People of Color. Although they may understand this phenomenon, they will not always be able to change it, even after repeated efforts. Their whiteness also may limit their effectiveness with other Whites. As the findings of this study revealed, they will be encouraged to join in the system of whiteness, and people may also assume they are complicit with the system. This results in opportunities for education but also in time spent in reaction to a system they are trying to dismantle. Although their positionality may change or vary due to other aspects of oppression or privilege such as class or physical ability, they, as Whites, will always be to some extent inside the system. This constrains their ability to “see” the system in order to develop effective strategies, while also giving them an “out” if things become too difficult. Their perspective will always be limited in relation to the system they are within. They can understand the system of race and its impact on others through relationships, empathy, or other parts of their own subjectivity but will always have blind spots related to their own whiteness.

The importance of relationships, especially with People of Color, cannot be emphasized enough. Living in a world where they are isolated from People of Color gives White educators the comfort of having their actions uncritiqued. Too often liberal educators hide behind the well-meaningness of their words and their research. In such practices that are conducted in isolation, failure to act against racist systems can go unnoticed, affording the practitioner the comfort of no one’s knowing that their words are merely words. They can remain aloof and untested, alone with their thoughts and good intentions. As the White adult educators in this study professed, it is when Whites are working closely with People of Color that internalized superiority often emerges and conflicts surface: Scratch a liberal hard enough and one may find a conservative.

For the people in this study, close relationships with People of Color during times of struggle were often the medium through which their convictions were tested. It was easy enough for many liberals to want to construct change for the unnamed and unknown who keep their distance and most importantly stay in their place. Certainly, according to several of the White antiracist educators, conflicts within and across racial lines, though sometimes painful, helped them to examine and address deep-seated and unknown biases. They observed White educators leaving groups when they felt that People of Color were not appropriately deferential or grateful, although it was more likely expressed in tenuous terms: “Why can’t they just listen?” “I really didn’t mean for it to sound that way,” “I’m used to dealing with people in power, and my ideas would work if they would just

give them a chance.” Again and again the White antiracist educators witnessed as White members abandoned their convictions and left the group when they felt that they were not being heard or validated.

Left unexamined and unaddressed, conflicts within personal relationships between People of Color and White adult educators can construct insurmountable barriers for some White adult educators. As they noted, it is the conscious decision to keep the conflicts on the table long enough to explore them that is key, and the deep, close relationships allow one to do so. Pivotal to the process of making change and being part of the change is the willingness to examine one’s own actions by asking, Am I part of the problem? or more accurately, How am I part of the problem? What the participants saw more often were Whites who had long ago decided that they were not part of the problem and who no longer examined their actions but instead remained untested because they had “anointed” themselves as part of the solution because after all they were well meaning, once participated in a freedom march, gave to the less fortunate, and even had a Black friend or two. For these compartmental thinkers, it didn’t matter that their children attended segregated private schools, that they were members of White-only social organizations, and that their neighbors all looked like them. According to the participants, such people were destined to have short-lived participation and educational environments that were also pseudoliberal sites, places where non-Whites were welcomed in small numbers and where non-Whites had to conform to societal expectations.

Several participants in this study talked about the importance of both/and thinking for Whites who are challenging racism, thinking that allows one to see oneself as racist and antiracist at the same time. This ability counters the tendency to think about racism in either/or terms and simultaneously takes into account the impact of our social system of power and our agency to challenge it. Furthermore, seeing oneself as only “racist” can lead many Whites to feelings of guilt and contribute to the inertia that already exists when they do not see the system of White supremacy at all. However, feelings of guilt and shame are self-indulgent, especially if they lead to inaction. Seeing oneself as only “antiracist” can lead to feelings of superiority compared to other Whites and ineffectiveness when working with People of Color, as once again the “antiracist” White is most likely the expert and in control of what happens, a position of supremacy. According to the adult educators in this study, a clear understanding by Whites of where they are in the social system along with *acting* on those understandings makes them more effective with everyone in the work for social justice.

The adult educators in this study demonstrate that it is possible to consistently confront and challenge a racist system and that it is possible to articulate a progressive White identity. Their abilities to continue their work over long periods of time while enduring the frustrations, setbacks, and

often daily affronts that occur are testimonies to the abiding presence of the human spirit. Their proclamation of the joy they also experience as they go about their work is equally inspiring. Most of them feel they are just ordinary people who have taken the challenge to work for social justice; they do not see themselves as extraordinary, but powerfully committed to the causes in which they believe. What they have done is to connect their lives, their daily lived experiences, with their passions to contribute to the creation of a better world for all. Their values are a touchstone for the actions they take. In today's world, one cannot help but find that extraordinary. In the struggle, there is hope.

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